WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method for detecting cancer in a subject comprising contacting a biological sample obtained from the subject with an antibody that binds an epitope on a blood protein degradation peptide that is masked in the blood protein and determining the presence of an antibody–peptide complex.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein the blood protein is fibrinogen.

3. The method of claim 2, wherein the antibody recognizes an epitope comprising the amino acids 15 to 21 of the β–chain of human fibrinogen.

4. The method of claim 3, wherein the antibody is a monoclonal antibody.

5. The method of claim 1, wherein the presence of the antibody–peptide complex is determined by an assay comprising an enzyme–linked immunoadsorbent assay.

6. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of screening a biological sample isolated from the subject for the presence of a second tumor marker.

7. The method of claim 6, wherein the second tumor marker is selected from the group consisting of PSA, CEA, CA 15–3, CA 19–9 and CA 125.

8. The method of claim 1, wherein the subject is a mammal.

9. The method of claim 8, wherein the subject is a human.

10. The method of claim 1, wherein the biological sample is a blood sample.

11. A method of detecting the presence of a fibrinogen degradation peptide associated with cancer in a biological sample comprising contacting the biological sample with an antibody that binds the degradation peptide and determining the presence of an antibody–peptide complex.

12. The method of claim 11, wherein the antibody recognizes an epitope comprising the amino acids 15 to 21 of the β–chain of human fibrinogen.

13. The method of claim 12, wherein the antibody is a monoclonal antibody.

14. The method of claim 11, wherein the presence of the antibody–peptide complex is determined by an assay comprising an enzyme–linked immunoadsorbent assay.

15. The method of claim 14, wherein the antibody is immobilized to a solid support.

16. The method of claim 15, wherein the enzyme–linked immunoadsorbent assay comprises a capture immunoassay wherein the antibody–peptide complex is detected with a second antibody which binds the peptide.

17. The method of claim 16, wherein the second antibody is joined to a detectable label.

18. The antibody of claim 17, wherein the detectable label is selected from the group consisting of radioactive isotopes, enzymes, or chromophores.

19. A method of detecting a disease process associated with the degradation of fibrinogen in a mammal comprising testing a biological sample isolated from the mammal for the presence of a peptide having an unmasked fibrinogen epitope by contacting the blood sample isolated from the mammal with an antibody specific for the peptide and determining the presence of an antibody–peptide complex.

20. The method of claim 19, wherein the antibody recognizes an epitope comprising the amino acids 15 to 21 of the β–chain of human fibrinogen.

21. The method of claim 20, wherein the antibody is a monoclonal antibody.